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#### IV.—STUDIES IN SUPERSTITION.<sup>1</sup>

##### PINDAR AND BACCHYLIDES.

Not that there is so little of superstition in Pindar's work should surprise us, but that there is so much. Truly, Pindar's bent of mind was not that of the lowly and the humble; the pride which caused him to link his name with that of Hiero as of equal worth did not incline him to seek the farmer's cottage and there, another Grimm, to listen to goblin-tales. The pessimistic bias of his thoughts, to which the words *σκιᾶς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος* give such a gloomy expression, might lead him into the Pythagorean conventicles, but could not make him seek help and protection from the evils of this life, at the feet of some shadowy figure of divine origin. The few nuggets, therefore, which can be found in the remnants of his poems are all the more valuable, because they allow us to infer that the beliefs mentioned by Pindar, must have exercised great power over the Greek mind.

I have no such estimate to offer of Bacchylides. The few passages, which I have been able to cull, are highly interesting indeed. But even the new finds leave his genius too indistinct to allow of giving their proper place to his religious views.

The following notes on Pindar will simply justify the insertion, into the "Catalogue", of the passage dealt with. As for the remainder, the Index must be taken for what it is meant to be, viz. building-material for the coming historian of Greek religion.

##### PINDAR, FGM. 107 CHR(IST): THE ECLIPSE.

This noble passage has been frequently quoted without receiving its proper place. Yet, I think that it is of some value for Greek superstition. I shall not speak here of the threatening significance which the poet ascribes to the obscuring of the sun<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. J. P. XVIII, 189.

<sup>2</sup> ἐλαύνεις τί νεώτερον ἢ πάρος, . . . πολέμον δ' εἰ σῆμα φέρεις τινός, ἢ καρποῦ φθίσιν, ἢ νιφετοῦ σθένος ὑπέρφατον, ἢ στάσιν οὐλομένην, ἢ πόντον κενέωσιν, ἢ παγετὸν χθονός, ἢ νότιον θέρος, ἢ γαῖαν κατακλῦσαισα θήσεις ἀνδρῶν νέον ἐξ ἀρχᾶς γένος . . .

nor will I press the meaning of the word *κλεπτόμενον*.<sup>1</sup> The fact that this poem preserves for us the only trace of a very old ritual is of much greater importance.

Written on the occasion of a solar eclipse, it is classed among the *ὑπορχήματα*.<sup>2</sup> These were choral songs, sacred to Apollo, accompanied by pantomimic gestures. In other words, they were hymns to the 'Averter' of evil,<sup>3</sup> accompanied by a *δρᾶσις* or representation of some adventure. To talk plain, ethnological English, they were "medicine-dances."

Going further, we may, conjecturally at least, retrace the contents of this special dance. When light is born, it is greeted by a dance of armed *πυρριχισταί*, the Curetes.<sup>4</sup> During their dance these spirits beat on their shields, in order to make as great a noise as possible. This is done in imitation of earthly rites; for just so the evil spirits threatening the new babe are driven away by the noise of metal instruments.<sup>5</sup>

Now the eclipse of the sun is due to evil spirits which must be driven away by the noise of bronze instruments.<sup>6</sup> This notice of Pliny's evidently must be brought to bear upon our passage, and we are thus enabled to state that during solar eclipses superstitious people tried to help the endangered god by a dance in which the fight with the evil spirit and its defeat was symbolically represented.

But was this done by the superstitious only? For whom did Pindar write his *ὑπόρχημα*? Did he put his proud pen at the disposal of some conventicle?

One, at least, of his *ὑπορχήματα* was of a higher character, as it was, if not written for Hiero, certainly addressed to him. Neither are indications wanting to show that our *ὑπόρχημα*, too, had an official character. The dancers, whoever they are, pray, not for their own salvation but for that of Thebes, their native city.<sup>7</sup> Nor is it imaginable that the exalted sentiment touching the feared disasters would have been acceptable to the adherents of those superstitious *θίασοι* which we know existed in Pindar's age. With

<sup>1</sup> ἄστρον ὑπέρτατον ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κλεπτόμενον.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Boeckh. de metris Pind. p. 270. Athen. 630 d.

<sup>3</sup> H. Usener, Götternamen, 302-312.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, Pasparios, Rhein. Mus. XLIX, 464.

<sup>5</sup> E. Rohde, Psyche<sup>1</sup> 248, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Pliny, N. H. II, 54; Pauly-Wissowa I, 41, 13.

<sup>7</sup> ἀπῆμον' ἐς οἴμόν τινα τράποιω Θήβας.

good reason, it seems to me, may we assume that this poem was composed as an official song to accompany the expiatory rites by which the city of Thebes tried to avert the portent.

We are vouchsafed but seldom an insight into the position which a great thinker took towards the feelings that pervaded the souls of his contemporaries. Such an opportunity, however, seems to be offered here. "Whether," Pindar says, "whether thou portendest war, or ruin of the crops, or overwhelming snow, or destructive revolution, or the flooding of the plains by the sea, or a freeze, or heat from the South; or whether thou art going, by a deluge, to renew from the beginning the race of men: I do not wail, for I shall but suffer in company with all." And again, if fgm. 142 Chr. has been correctly assigned to the same poem as 107: "God has the power to raise unblemished light from black night, and again to wrap in black-clouded darkness the pure sheen of day."

If the first words betray an almost stoical resignation to the common fate, the latter breathe an almost Christian confidence in God's omnipotence. Views which are not altogether incompatible. But even if they were, their apparent contradictoriness would not be surprising in a poet who proclaimed two mutually exclusive views of the life after death.<sup>1</sup> Yet we must try to find the relation of the poet's belief to that of his compatriots. Was Pindar simply an unbeliever who adapted his thoughts to the demands of the hour? Did he simply yield to the orders of his employers when he wrote this *ὑπόρχημα*? And what was his attitude toward the faithful and their apotropaic rites? He himself has given the answer to these questions. Just as he has treated the Pelops-legend, not rejecting any feature of the popular myth, but purifying and ennobling it, so he has done here: under the touch of his genius the plain medicine-dance has acquired a nobility of sentiment in which the common herd had no share, but which may have contributed, on its part, to give new ideas to these simple folks, however unconsciously imbibed.

PINDAR, OL. I, 73-76; VI, 57 FF.: THE CONJURING OF SPIRITS.

"Popular beliefs", says E. Rohde,<sup>2</sup> "twine themselves round almost the whole theology of Pindar's. A true poet, as a faithful

<sup>1</sup> E. Rohde, *Psyche* 1 496-514.

<sup>2</sup> *Psyche* 1 508.

steward of the popular myth, he does not reject it, but purifies and ennobles it."

The two passages to be considered likewise have been built upon a foundation of popular belief. Both describe the invocation of a god whose help is to be asked for, and both employ all the salient features of a *κατάδεσμος*. How lasting these features were, how deep-rooted in the beliefs of the Greeks, is proved by the fact that every one of them is found again in the Magical Papyri, over six centuries after Pindar. I shall let the parallel speak for itself:

Pelops goes οἶος ἐν ὀρφνῇ (Iamos goes νυκτὸς ὑπαιθριος) ἐγγὺς ἀλὸς πολιᾶς ('Αλφεῶ μέσσω καταβάς : Iamos).<sup>1</sup> Both call here upon Poseidon, who παρ' ποδὶ σελεδὸν φάνη.

The magician goes πρὶν ὃ ἥλιος ἀναβαίνει πρὸς τὸν Νεῖλον (the river takes, for the Egyptians, the place of the sea) μηδενὸς ἄλλου κατιδόντος (Pap. Paris, 26-40); he invokes the god and immediately φανήσεται, ὃν φωνεῖς, Pap. Par. 249 (Wessely, Denkschr. Wien. Ak. XXXVI.

The comparison ought to be convincing. Pindar has evidently made use of material available in the superstitious rites of his age. But he has molded this material so skillfully, and has harmonized it with its surroundings so artistically that nobody would suspect the humble birth of his verses, were it not for the irrefutable testimony of the papyri.

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<sup>1</sup> This disproves Böhmer's contention that Pelops goes to the sea because Poseidon lives there. For Iamos, too, calls upon Poseidon.

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- Nile, sources replenished by a Giant, Pind. fgm. 283 Chr.
- Oath, sworn by the Earth, Bacchyl. V 42; VIII 3 f.; cp. Death, Earth.
- Omen, Pind. Pyth. IV 34 f.; Ol. VI 3 f. Pyth. I 33 f. (cp. *καταρχή*); Pyth. IV 19 ff. (cp. *ὀρνιθομαντεία*); Ol. XII 7 ff. (cp. *σύμβολοι*); Ol. VIII 37 ff.; Ol. VI 54 ff. (cp. Iamos, Ion, Name); Pyth. IV 23, 197 ff. (cp. Thunder).
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- , and prophecy, Pind. Ol. VI 45 ff.; cp. Bees, Honey.



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——, represented as an animal, driven by Zeus, Pind. Ol. IV 1 ff.; perhaps as an eagle, Bacchyl. V 19 f.

——, death by lightning makes immortal, Pind. Ol. II 27 f.

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Utopia (*Schlaraffenland*) = 'Isles of the Blest', Pind. Ol. II 70 ff.; = the Hyperborean country, Pyth. X 31 ff.

Wand of Death, Pind. Ol. IX 33; cp. Hades.

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Wedding, time for, Pind. Isthm. VII 44; cp. Moon.

#### IV.

##### THEOCRITUS.

To the folk-lorist the study of Theocritus is a disappointment. The master and, practically, the *εὐρητής*, of bucolic poetry should, we expect, abound in those rare traits of popular belief which certainly filled the souls of those very herdsmen and vintners whose life and love he was singing. Yet, a glance at the Index will show that the yield is very meagre. Not, indeed, in quantity; for the number of items is considerable. But they are of minor importance. This will appear paradoxical to the reader who is accustomed to hear the praises of Theocritus sung. Let us, then, seek the reasons for this phenomenon.

What was the point of view from which Theocritus approached his subject? Living for some time in Cos, the pupil and friend

of poets who are nothing, if not artificial, a guest at the court of the Ptolemies with its hyper-refinement, he felt with the instinct of the *littérateur* the attractive novelty of those rural scenes, in the midst of which he probably passed his boyhood. His are not idyls in the modern sense, sprung from a feeling of satiety, of loathing caused by the vices and exactions of an artificial society, but genre-paintings for the connoisseur of art. When his poems first appeared they must have exercised a charm upon his reading public, similar to that which Kipling's tales exercise over our minds. But we must find in his work the same faults as in those of Kipling: we see everywhere the poet behind his creation, and not for one moment do we lose the feeling that the author himself, the masterly painter of scenes from low life, moves, and delights to move, in circles far above those to which he introduces us. It was the aim of Theocritus, as it is that of Kipling, to blaze out a trail hitherto untrodden, to present to his readers a novel life, the life of those whom his friends ordinarily contemplated with a mingled feeling of repulsion and curiosity. Naturally, the religious thoughts of his heroes and heroines had to be left in the dim background. It is significant that we know of no work of his contemporaries treating of folk-lore, however eagerly they sought for that which Panofka has aptly termed "*Verlorene Mythen*". The reason for this is manifest. This was not novel, it was a sphere of belief in which probably a great many even of the educated shared, and which, therefore, seemed not to be especially noteworthy. This statement seems to be contradicted by the Second Idyl. But it will be remembered that the magical detail therein was borrowed from Sophron's *Mimus*. The other items of superstition, catalogued by me, can hardly be said to present any new aspect, and they cannot have been new to the Coan or Alexandrian reader who was familiar with the material which Theophrastus used for his *Δεισιδαιμόνων*.

Secondly, not only from the standpoint of the *littérateur*, but also from that of the artist, Theocritus could feel no call for filling his poems with allusions to popular beliefs. His seems not to have been the modern method of collecting characteristic data, and then working them into a carefully planned 'realistic' picture. He can certainly not be charged with the excess of erudition which mars the painful work of some of his contemporaries. While this contributes to the charm of his poetry, and

lends it the character of simplicity, yet it detracts from his archaeological value.

Nor, thirdly, does it seem to have been in the character of the *man*, to devote himself to a careful observation of detail. Quite contrary to our expectation, he can, by no means, be called one of the "Kleinmeister", or, as he would have said himself, perhaps, a *ῥυπαρογράφος*. He cannot be said to have gone into tedious detail in any one of his poems. It is interesting, in this connection, to compare his *Adoniazusae*, for example, with the poems of Herondas, especially in regard to the language in which the mistresses address their slaves.<sup>1</sup>

In closing this introduction, I wish to say expressly, that I am far from censuring Theocritus for his failure to impart antiquarian information. For the loss of the student certainly has been the gain of the lover of art.

1. The Goddess 'Ανάγκη? (XVI, 82-85).

Our passage is mentioned neither in Roscher's *Lexicon* nor in Wissowa's *Encyclopaedia*. Nor does Dieterich, who speaks of the "demon 'Ανάγκη",<sup>2</sup> refer to it. 'A. was certainly worshipped in Corinth,<sup>3</sup> a city maintaining relations with Sicily. Now, Theocritus connects here Syracuse with Corinth (82-84). This seems to confirm an assumption of the worship of 'A. in Syracuse. Monumental proof, however, is lacking. I can find no mention of a goddess, 'A. in the *Inscriptiones Graecae Italiae et Siciliae*.

2. The Poem 'Αλιεύς (Ps. Th. XXI).

I shall not enter upon the question of the time of this spurious poem. But the reader's attention deserves to be called to its strange conformity to the rules of Dream-interpretation as laid down by Artemidorus of Daldis. Thus, in lines 40-41, we hear that the dream just related must be true. "For I had not eaten much; as you remember, we dined early and sparingly". Compare with this, Art. I, 8: "in all dreams whose cause one cannot find, we must consider, whether the dreamer went to bed after a moderate meal or after an ample dinner. For with a burdened stomach one cannot expect to see a true vision". This was the generally accepted theory, as is borne out by Plutarch.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This has been done by Legrand, in his *Étude sur Théocrite*, p. 134, who has also discussed in detail his lack of erudition (p. 128), and his failure to observe accurately (p. 140).

<sup>2</sup> Abraxas 101 f.; Nekyia 124.

<sup>3</sup> Pausanias II, 4, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* VIII 3, 1 (734 F.).

But it is further to be noted that the dream itself—of the catch of a golden fish—and its interpretation follow the rules. After a prolonged struggle a golden fish has been brought up. According to Artemidorus<sup>1</sup> this falls under the heading of subjective dreams, which form the first of the five classes into which allegorical visions are divided, namely, dreams in which we see ourselves acting or suffering. Whatever these dreams mean, they refer to the dreamer alone. Just so the fisherman of our poem announces that the good luck to come will come to himself. Secondly, he does not doubt that he is destined to become rich, since the fish has been golden. Now, it is true that gold portends death to a sick man,<sup>2</sup> its color, temperature and weight being related to death, but it also signifies good luck.<sup>3</sup> “Gold does not forebode on account of its material, as some say, but, on the contrary, it brings luck. It does this, however, only, if it neither surpasses the limits nor is unsuitable in form, as chains for a man, nor is beyond one’s position, as crowns and plate for a pauper”. And again:<sup>4</sup> “To catch many, and large, fish is good and profitable for everyone, not of sedentary habits, (since fish are always moving), nor a sophist (i. e. a professional lecturer of the kind described by E. Rohde<sup>5</sup>; for to him, fish, as voiceless, would be unlucky”.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, as the *ἑσθλός ὀνειροκρίτης* cuts down the hopes of our dreamer,<sup>7</sup> just so we read in Artemidorus,<sup>8</sup> that every *θαῦμα* or impossibility causes deception and vain hopes.

In marked contrast with these instances of agreement, and yet bearing out the judgment of Artemidorus, are verses 32 and 33: οὗτος ἄριστος ὀνειροκρίτας, ὁ διδάσκαλός ἐστι παρ’ ᾧ νοῦς.

### 3. The Grateful Bees (VII, 78–82).

While scholars have always recognized, that this narrative belongs to the scanty stock of Greek fairy-tales, yet it seems never to have been assigned to its proper type, that of the “Grateful Animal”. A. Marx, indeed, to whom we owe the best investigation of the series, expressly denies the existence of such tales concerning bees,<sup>9</sup> and seems to ascribe the relation between men and bees to the mantic character of the animals. Neither does Olck, in his article,<sup>10</sup> refer to our passage, although he adverts to the connection of the bee with the Muses.

<sup>1</sup> Art. I 7.

<sup>2</sup> Art. I, 37.

<sup>3</sup> II, 5.

<sup>4</sup> II, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Griech. Roman 288 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. with this Petronius, Cena Trimalch. 39.

<sup>7</sup> XXI, 63 ff.

<sup>8</sup> II, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Märchen von dankbaren Tieren, p. 124<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Wissowa’s Encyclopaedia, sub Biene.

Now the tale, as told by Theocritus, runs as follows: a herder of goats was shut up by his master in a wooden box, having incurred his displeasure. Bees, however, came flying, and fed him on their honey, because the Muse had poured sweet nectar on his lips, i. e., because he was a poet. The tale was known in the fourth century B. C., as we learn from the scholia. These also add the happy solution, omitted by Theocritus, how, after two months, the master opens the box, only to find the man still living and his prison filled with honeycombs. The scholia also give a reason for the behavior of the bees, differing from that of Theocritus: *ἔθυν ἐπὶ συχὰ ταῖς Μούσαις*. This statement contains the key of the situation. The bees are the incarnation of the Muses themselves, who show their gratitude for the herder's piety by coming to his aid at the critical moment. The identity of the bees and the Muses is clear from the many passages connecting them.<sup>1</sup> Even Marx, rationalist though he be, has conceded that the identity of animal and god is the underlying "mythical motif" of all the tales treating of the "grateful animal".<sup>2</sup> They all, as far as their mythical content can be understood, belong to the same type as the story of the rescue of Simonides by the Dioscuri, and, ultimately, fall under the "Contract" view of the relation between god and man, of which I have spoken elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. The Lullaby (XXIV 7, 9).

It is interesting to observe how felicitous Theocritus has been in striking the popular note. The verses under consideration are from the cradle-song of a mother who rocks her babies, Hercules and Iphicles, to sleep. No one, I imagine, can read these lines without being reminded of modern lullabies. There is, however, an element of unconscious superstition, if I may say so, in the way in which a perfectly natural element is expressed. At all times, man has been afraid that Sleep, this miraculous, temporary suspension of the activities of life, may pass over into the everlasting suspension of Death. In praying for sleep, therefore, one must be very careful to express also the desire of waking again, else the sleep may be continued beyond awakening. To this superstitious fear, I am inclined to ascribe the peculiar expression<sup>4</sup> *ἐγέρσιμος ὕπνος*. That this vague fear is

<sup>1</sup> Olck, l. c.

<sup>2</sup> L. c., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Transact. Am. Philol. Assoc. XXVII, 15 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Vs. 7.

really uppermost in the mother's mind is shown by the reiteration of the sentiment in verse 9: "Sleep safely, and safely see the dawn again!" It is this careful choice of well-omened words in prayer which characterizes ancient religion of the popular mind as against the prayer of a philosopher, like M. Aurelius, and, more still, as against the fervid effusion of the adherents of revealed religions.<sup>1</sup> Here, it seems to me, the boundary line between the prayer, welling up straight from the heart,—and such prayers assuredly the best among the ancients prayed no less than we—and the prayer of the *δεισιδαίμων*—and the majority of the ancient believers were *δεισιδαίμονες* in the literal sense of the word—is most sharply drawn.

5. The Demon: Old Age (XXIX, 26–27).

"We grow old more quickly than one can spit".

The idea is plain enough. But why should the action of spitting be especially expressive of speed? "Morbos despuimus," says Pliny,<sup>2</sup> and the use of this phrase has been well explained by Mr. Nicholson in his excellent pamphlet on "The Saliva Superstition."<sup>3</sup> Spittle is prohibitive in its action, keeps away the evil spirits, and prevents their doing mischief. Such an evil spirit Old Age is also. There are still existing a number of Vase Paintings, on which Herakles defeats an old man, ugly of face, whom the artist has designated as *Γῆρας*.<sup>4</sup>

But, according to Theocritus, old age is too quick for the remedy to take effect. Here, a similar belief about another 'demon' comes to our help. If you meet a wolf, don't let him see you first, or you will lose your power of speech.<sup>5</sup> Evidently, the same idea prevailed about Old Age. Were it possible to see the enemy approach, we should be safe from his attack.

6. Threatening the God: Theocr. VII 106–114.

This is one more passage from our poet which finds its analogy in the Magical Papyri.<sup>6</sup> Simichidas invokes Pan to

<sup>1</sup> Where, in revealed religion, prayer adopts formulas, such superstitious character may creep in. I remember a childish evening-prayer, in which the emphasis is laid upon the "straight limbs of the child", expressing the hope that he may rise the next morning, with "all his limbs still straight"!

<sup>2</sup> N. H. XXVIII, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Harvard Studies in Class. Philol. VIII, 23 ff.

<sup>4</sup> All conveniently collected in Furtwängler's *Bronzen von Olympia*, text to no. 699.

<sup>5</sup> Wissowa, *Encyclop.* I 81, 50. Demons in animal shape: Bienkowski, Malocchio, in *Eranos Vindobonensis*.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. Wessely, *Denkschr.* Wien. Akad. Phil. Hist. XXXVI, 27 f.

come to the aid of his unhappy friend Aratos. "If you do so", he says, "then the boys in Arcady shall not whip your sides with *σκιλλαι* because they have been short of meat.<sup>1</sup> But, if you help him not, may you be torn by their finger-nails, may you live in the regions of extreme northern cold in winter, and of extreme southern heat in summer!"<sup>2</sup> Just so there are in the Magical Papyri many instances of threats uttered against the god or demon, if he refuses to help the sorcerer.<sup>3</sup> The underlying idea, in both cases, is of course the same. And a very strange one it is, that the power of the worshipper is greater than that of the god he worships, and that it is possible for him to make the god suffer. This idea, so repugnant to us, and, be it said, also to the more elevated minds among the ancients, can yet claim a very great antiquity. For, ultimately, it must go back to the idea of a covenant in which the two contracting parties are, at least, equal.

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot go here into a discussion of the original meaning of this peculiar treatment. It is possible that the interpretation of Theocritus is a late attempt to explain the survival of an obsolete "Fertility-Charms", about which Mannhardt's Wald- und Feldkulte ought to be consulted. Though the idea, as in Theocritus, is simple enough, and has survived in our own age. So Italians heap indignities upon the statue of their patron saint, if he refuses to grant their prayer.

<sup>2</sup> The confusion of ideas is interesting. The first threat can apply only to the statue of the god which is thought of as animated and inhabited by the god himself, while the second threat can apply only to the invisible, bodiless god who roams the fields at his sweet will. Such a confusion is decidedly popular ('volkstümlich') and another example of Theocritus's power of observation.

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